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Fred Beaton: Mr. Allen, when we start out will you give us a brief summary of where you was born, what school you attended and why did you seek education as a profession?

Rayford Allen: Yeah, I was born in Cairo, Georgia, March the 8th, 1911 and my mother moved to Florida shortly thereafter. And I remember—the first place I remember was Lakeland, Florida. And I remember being there during World War I. And one of the things that I remember indelibly was some of our black boys going to France saying they were going to bring the Kaiser's head back. I also remember vividly the signing of the Armistice, the ringing of the bells, the shooting of guns and the people shouting, especially one of my mother's very dear friends who had two boys. She was shouting saying, "There's peace in France this morning. Buster's in France this morning." She was one happy soul, Mrs. Thomas.

And I remember living in Nachotee [Nocatee], Florida, a place that was infested with a lot of mosquitoes. I don't remember the period we were there, but it was only a short time. We moved to Tampa shortly after World War I. We spent our first night in a house and the corner of Governor and Estelle and the next day we moved to 1313 North A and we stayed there—right that spell. And left there after my mother married Mr. Richard Brooks who had lost his wife in Monticello, Florida and retired from the farm and come to live with his sister. We moved in 1920 to LaSalle—I don't remember the number there—and we lived there a short while and left about two weeks before the big fire. I don't know whether you ever heard of the big fire in West Tampa.

FB: What year was this?

RA: This was 1920. All of this was 1920. And we moved to Western, either 07, or 607, something like that. But, anyway, we lived in front of Ms. Pugh's mother. Do you know Esther Pugh?

FB: I want to ask you one other thing concern—what was the "big fire"?

RA: Well, just about all of West Tampa burned down. You see, the houses were so close you could almost step from one porch to the next—the one house—once the fire started was—all of West Tampa, I believe, at that time, was an incorporated city and they didn't have a fire department large enough to cope with the fire. And I do remember that the houses we lived in were a total casualty. And, as I was saying, we lived in front of Mrs. Beer—Esther Pugh's. Esther Pugh is in the school system here now. And her mother—next to us were the Roaches. And I always make a joke out of it, said—my mother married a Mr. Brooks, as I mentioned, so—"There was a Brook's, the Roache's, and the Beer's."

Heh—encountered the hurricane that destroyed so much of Bayshore and much of Tampa in 1921. I believe it was twenty-one [1921]. The roof—most of the roof was—roofing, I should say—was blown off our house and the owner didn't repair it so we stopped paying rent. He kept tacking signs up "For Rent." We would pull 'em down as fast as he would tack them up. Meantime, my parents bought property out here and built. And they came out so often I thought, you know, they had a completed house when we moved out, but they didn't have a roof on it, didn't have any siding—well, maybe about six or eight inches of siding and about six or eight inches of flooring, no doors. I was a terrified person coming to a situation like that.

And I began attending school in the church out here, Spring Hill Baptist Church. It must have been about second or third grade. And I attended school in the Spring Hill Baptist Church until I finished the 6th grade in 1925. And between my finishing 6th grade and 7th grade I got my hip dislocated. It was always a mystery until I went to college and studied physiology and found out that you could have a pathogenic dislocation. that is one caused disease that was really causing my dislocate hip which I still have.

So, nineteen days after the 1925-26 school term began, I entered the school, Booker T. Washington. It was just built then. It was a high school. It had twelve rooms, six upstairs and six downstairs. And it was not called Booker T. then, it was called Blanche Street School. And I had forgotten that until I think I read an old annual or either read the plaque placed on a building. Mr. A. J. Schutes was the principal. I don't know whether his name has been mentioned in any of your—he was the first principal of Booker T. He came to us from Lakeland, Florida. And we talk about the unruly kids being something relatively new. Well, back in the twenties, I don't remember whether it was twenty-six [1926] or twenty-seven [1927] or twenty-eight [1928]—it had to be one of those years because I don't think Mr. Schutes was principal—but two or three years, his son shot, there in the school, one of the female students. Her name was Ms. Douglas. I think her name was Letha Douglas. A very attractive light-skinned girl.

And I felt rather proud, and I still feel proud, of the fact that the school offered scholarships for the best attendance and the best scholarship. And for the first two or three years that Booker T. was in existence and that prize was offered, I was the recipient of both of them, even though I had to walk about a mile from here to the streetcar line. You know where the pool is down there? That's where the streetcar terminated. And then get off the streetcar and Estelle and Franklin or either Scott and Franklin and walk over to Booker T. And that's what I had to do for most of the six years that I attended. For Booker T. Washington was a seven through twelve [grades] at that time. There was no graduation from junior high up to senior high. You just graduated from high school.

And then I graduated from Booker T. in 1931. But let me back up and say when I was in 6th grade, I decided then that I wanted to be a teacher. And from many of the things I remember I had the inclination, propensity or whatever you want to say, because my teachers would appoint me to assist in their instruction, because from two or three what—whichever it was, when I was going to Spring Hill Church, we had one teacher for the 6 grades or the 7 grades. I don't think we ever went any higher than the seventh. And of particular interest to me in the 6th grade was the fact my teacher would have me to call the spelling for the 7th grade. I'd say, well, it seems to me she should have reserved that for herself since the 7th grade was in a higher grade than I—as I look back now, realizing that I was the valedictorian and best all-around student in my high school class of 1931, I guess I had, you know, pretty ability and this is what the teacher recognized.

So when I, in my 12th year we were encouraged to take the teacher's examination. This was the old State Teacher's Examination that was given in various centers—well, I guess in every county seat. In February of 1931, several of my classmates, I don't remember how many, and I went to this examination. And I passed. The lowest certificate, a 3rd grade certificate, was good for one year and it permitted you to teach grades 1 through 8th, all the subjects for that grade. So having a semester to complete in high school, when I did get out I was not able to go to college, but this was my choice. I received a contract to teach out here at the Spring Hill School in my own community.

So after a semester my certificate expired. Prior to expiration, I went on the Teacher's Examination again and made a higher grade, I mean the second grade certificate, that was good for three years—talking the same expect it's—one thing I remember vividly about that examination was that, while I thought I made a perfect score on orthography, which was a combination spelling, rules of spelling, punctuation, my grade was 99 and I never have been able to figure what that one percentage point was taken for—taken away from me for. That was my highest grade. So I kept that certificate alive, that second grade certificate, by attending summer school. And I began teaching in 1931 here at the Spring Hill School. And at that time they had built a three-room school on the edge of a sandy slope. The reason it was built there, somebody donated the land. This was the kind of situation that we experienced back there.

Negro—the taxpayers' money was not spent, by and large, to buy school sites for blacks. If so, it was always some dump, or some undesirable spot, that was gotten almost for nothing. And I think these two or three lots were given to the school board and they built

us a three-room school. And I began teaching 2nd, 3rd and I think 4th grade under Mr. A. J. Knowles, who was a very short but very knowledgeable, a positive principal who hailed from Key West, Florida. I worked under him for one year. But I should mention that I made a very large salary. I made \$50 a month for 8 months. Which meant my year's earning was worth \$400. There were no fringe benefits. That was it. Turned out, at the end of the term, what we called poor.

And after one year Mr. Knowles was transferred to Midway Academy. I don't know whether that name has ever popped up. They changed the name of that school and named it for a Mr. Marshall. Marshall School was once Midway Academy. Mr. Knowles became principal there. Because I was a man and because I was large and probably could control the children I was offered the school—the principalship of Spring Hill School which was still just an elementary school. I accepted it. My salary was ten percent less than Mr. Knowles. Mr. Knowles received \$70 a month and I received \$63. I can't remember but I believe the school term was shortened because we were in the Hoover Depression in the '30s. And the next year I was reassigned to Spring Hill School as principal with a 25 percent cut in salary. So my salary dropped from \$63 to \$47.25 a month. And, of course, the term was shortened. I believe that was the year they only had enough money to run school six and half months. They asked us to make the choice of giving two weeks and having a seven-month term or they would give us just six months. So we preferred a half loaf to no loaf at all. We gave a half month and worked seven months. That salary remained at that level, I believe, for two or three years.

I do know when I left in 1935—excuse me, in March—no, I shouldn't say I left, I should explain that I resigned to accept the principalship of Glover School. I know you've heard of Glover. It's out in the Plant City area. My salary there was \$54.50, so that was a good bit better and I was promised a nine-month term. I stayed at Glover from 1935 to 1944. And my salary increased in increments from \$2.25 per month, so you can multiply nine times \$2.25 and you can see what my annual increase was. Not too much. During that time that I married, when I was at Glover—1940. 1944 I was transferred to Frederick Douglass School. That might be another name that's not familiar to you. That school's been phased out. That was in Port Tampa. Practically all the schools where I've worked have been phased out. Glover is the only one that hasn't been phased. Glover and Booker T. are the only ones that have not been phased out. Henderson is the only one that is still being used but not for instruction.

And I'll stick a pin there and say that even though I finished high school in thirty- one [1931], it was thirty-three [1933]—the summer of thirty-three [1933] before I attended college. But I did take some correspondence—we call it "extension" work. But the instructors would come down from [Florida] A & M on Saturdays and teach us. And I believe I earned something like fifteen or eighteen hours that first summer. I had a very good scholastic record so I was able to take some courses. I think I've made one C in all of my college work, that was the physics. The rest of 'em were mostly A's and a few Bs, and I graduated with "greater distinction" in 1947.

In 1958 I received my M.Ed. from Florida A & M. I was invited to join an honor society,

but I was too poor to dish up the cash. I regret now that I didn't try to borrow it, because that was a distinct honor. I attended Bethune-Cookman a while, I think, and I received, what is now called an A.A., but at that time it was just a junior college diploma, in 1937. So in spans of ten years I was making—reaching another level—thirty-seven [1937] I received my Associate degree. In forty-seven [1947] I received my B.S. in elementary education. And, had it not been for the fire—we lost our home, completely destroyed, in forty-seven [1947]. That was January—it was real cold at that time. I would have gone back to school and received my master's, but that took something out of me, and I just didn't have any mind to go back to school.

So I went back in fifty-eight [1958]. I received a master's degree. My ambition was, when I was in high school, was to—if you ever had a chance to see the yearbook of the class of thirty-one [1931], you'll see my ambition was to obtain a Ph.D. degree. But after I married and got a family things changed and I never received it. Integration came on and I retired in seventy-one [1971] at age sixty-one because I didn't feel I—my experience nor my training fitted me to match the challenges of an integrated school system, where I found the white teachers would bypass the school administrator and go straight to an administrator downtown or maybe to the superintendent which—and they allowed that sort of thing to go on.

FB: How much were you making? What was your income at the end of your principalship?

RA: You know, I have to look at my contract. I was making good salaries. I was making—bringing home over a thousand a month for eleven months. It had to be something like—between 13 and \$15,000 a year. I didn't worried about—I had too many other things to worry about than to worry about my salary.

FB: Right, but I was just tryin' to—

RA: I understand.

FB: —you know, carry through with all the smaller ones.

RA: Well, I'll tell you this, maybe you're gonna ask me it; what do I get in retirement?

FB: No.

RA: Well, I'm gonna tell you. I get \$586.99 a month, twelve months a year. So you can see, I make more in one month in retirement than I made in a whole year for the first, I'd say, ten years. I might make this point that although I was in a professional capacity I never even had to file income taxes 'til about 1944 or 1945 when I went to Frederick Douglass School. And even then I didn't owe any. In fact, I wasn't making as much as a common laborer. See, \$400 for a year—for eight months—well, you can see.—Well, \$50 a month that amounts to, what, \$12.50 a week, right? And then if you divide it by fifty-two weeks that comes out to a real small figure. So I—say, I wasn't makin' as much as a

common laborer.

FB: Were times hard? Could you live out of that \$50 a month?

RA: Sure. I always saved a little. That was good money. And I remember having a suit. I could always a pair of blue serge trousers, tailor-made, \$25, out of the best serge.

FB: Mr. Allen, what were the conditions of blacks, say, when you first came to Tampa?

RA: Well, all I can remember is that there was a lot of discrimination and blacks lived in very poor conditions. And the [Ku Klux] Klans were running rampant at that time. There was quite a bit of fear and people—those were some of the things I remember along with the fact that you were—blacks had to ride on the—you know, on the rail—the streetcars. No matter how many seats were empty up front, if there were none empty in the back you had to stand up. And the same thing was on the trains. Of course, there wasn't anything like going to white restaurants. But, strangely, barbering was something that was monopolized by black people when we first came to Tampa. There were no white barbers. Black men were cutting white men's hair downtown, or wherever there were barbershops.

FB: How was the Depression?

RA: Well, it was pretty bad because you had to depend upon handouts from the government. Commodities, they called it. But, I don't know; my people, you know, had enough land to raise a garden and they had chickens and that sort of thing so it—we didn't feel it quite as badly as some people. Some of the people had it real tough. I remember that I couldn't get a lot of clothes. So as far as food, we always had plenty of food at our place, but there were a lot of people who really were up against it. You know what I mean?

FB: Do you remember anything about Clara Frye?

RA: Yes.

FB: The lady herself?

RA: Yes.

FB: Could you tell us, a little bit about her? Or as much as you remember?

RA: Well, all I can remember is that, you know, she operated the hospital. I was pretty young then and. I don't know too much about her except that I did see her and knew what she had philanthropic spirit, one that impelled her to do something about health care for her people. This was, I think, started in her home over on Mitchell and eventually they—she built one over an a—Lamar. And incidentally, although at age thirteen I had this physical handicap, I've never been in the hospital. I needed to go. Doctor diagnosed me in

his office and then treated me at home. He used the dining room table as a—treatment table. A naturopathic doctor, whose name I don't remember now, kept—pulled, turned, twist, what have you, to skip back in place but it—I think he did more harm than he did good because it's still out of place and broken according to the latest x-rays. In fact, yes, and that's why I have to have orthopedic work done on one of my shoes so that when I walk I don't limp, you know, so bad limp. When I stand I don't have to stand one side and I can stand level, more or less.

I'm sorry I can't tell you any more about Ms. Clara Frye except that she did establish a hospital that was named for her and when the WPA, that was one of the federal ag—

Side 1 ends; side 2 begins.

RA: — construct the hospital that was named for her. And Dr. J.R.E. Lee, president, a longtime pioneer, president of Florida A & M, came down and made the dedicatorial speech, I always remember one of the things he said to the audience—had a lot white people in the audience—he said that a white mistress shouldn't feel badly towards the negro cook or maid who took the ham out of the refrigerator. Said all she was doing was collecting her back wages. (laughs) She wasn't stealing. She was just collecting her back wages. And in that same vein, see, in the next half hour I'll be going to the Senior Citizen Nutrition Center where you may donate for the meals, but I don't donate because I tell 'em that's just part of our back wages (laughs) and I'm collecting.

FB: What about—can you tell me anything about the civil rights movement in Tampa?

RA: No. No more than what Dr. Lowry has probably told you. He was one of the leaders of—and—well, he, principally, he and the young folk— because most of the—most of us were afraid, you know, to step out in front. I remember Dr. Martin Luther King coming to Tampa one time, speaking here, in the sixties [1960's]. I felt a little cheated because they said all of the principals and a whole lot of businesspeople were invited to be platform guests, but the programs—we were told that, you know, it would cost us \$25, \$50 or \$100 to receive that honor and a lot of people gave 'em a rubber stamp—I mean rubber checks. I didn't have my checkbook. Whatever it was, something like \$50 or \$100, I gave it, was able to give it, but I think they should have told us in advance without get us in a situation so [it] will not put them in a situation where they'll be embarrassed not to give it.

Now, I do remember when we had separate and unequal schools. They called 'em separate and equal, but they were separate and unequal from 19—time I remember attending schools until possibly 1940. I don't remember the exact year, but Mr. Ben Griffin and Mr. Ed Davis, who was president of Central Life, were at the forefront supported by the NAACP in stamping out the inequality in schools. The suit was filed and Thurgood Marshall, who is now on the Supreme Court bench, was the lawyer who argued the case successfully. And Miss Hilda Turner who—I think, she was the guinea pig. She was the person whose name that the suit was filed because she was, perhaps, one of the better trained—better qualified persons who, even if she lost her job, wouldn't have

any problem securing employment elsewhere.

And after the suit was won—or was it before?—the county began some kind of merit system whereby you were graded and most of the black teachers were graded bottom of the scale. Just one or two were in the upper echelons. And I think this was one of the things that the suit addressed, the continued inequities brought on by this so-called merit system that categorized most of the black teachers to the bottom of the scale. Anything else?

FB: Okay. Anything else you'd like to say?

RA: Well, I'd like to tell you that when I first came out here in 1921 there were very few people living out here. And I think from what is now Yukon [Street] on the south and the railroad of Busch Boulevard on the north was inhabited only by blacks. And the roads were all dirt roads. The first improvement to them was putting clay on them. From clay we went to sawdust. I believe that's right. It may have been the other way around. And the next improvement were shells. And from shells to blacktop.

People were a close-knit group that had the interest of each other at heart. It seemed to me that it was an eternity before anybody died. I know it wasn't that long, because when you're a small child it was like Christmas was years away, and I associate that with my feeling about the goodness of the people. I'm talking about my mother right now. This was a very good place. It was so good the people, they didn't die here. The first person that I remember dying was the mother of a church, Mother Phipps. She worked all day, came home and went to prayer meeting. And after prayer meeting she died. And we thought that was a very sweet way for a person to die.

One of the things I mentioned about this being a close-knit community where the people were concerned about one another—due to poverty, a lot of people didn't have insurance. Maybe their insurance would get behind. And when they died, or got sick, didn't have anything going for 'em. People would either go around and pass the hat or they would take a collection in the church to tide the people over. I've seen them take up a collection at the funeral to pay for the funeral expenses. We don't have that kind of concern out here now, hardly anywhere.

FB: Okay. Mr. Allen, can you tell us your wife's name and how many children you've got?

RA: My wife was Geraldine. She was Geraldine Jones before our marriage, and we are the parents of three boys and three girls, all of us living except the oldest girl, Jewel, who died at age twenty-one and that was in April of 1968, after completing high school and two years of junior college at St. Pete J. C.—or Junior College it was called then. All of them are married except the baby girl and the baby boy. We have five grandchildren, three—four grandsons and one granddaughter.

FB: How old are they? Those are who you are going to pick up?

RA: Yeah, the grand-boys, the twins, Jerrod and Jerome, I believe they're seven, should be eight in August. I believe I'm right on that. Their parents both work at GTE. The baby girl works for Hillsborough County School Board. Mr. Walter Turner is her immediate superior. Our oldest boy, Joseph, drives a Tampa Transit bus. The baby boy is somewhat of a bum, Edgar.

FB: Okay, Mr. Allen, before we close can you—what is your opinion of disruptive school situation that we have now?

RA: Well, I think, if I understand your question—the disruption in the school, is something that has been brought on by many factors, one of which is the—I believe—I'm gonna say, the abdication of the parents, I think that's what I'm gonna say.

FB: That's right. That's right.

RA: Of their responsibility, which they didn't accept when the schools were not integrated.

FB: Right.

RA: They left everything to the teachers. And they think that the sure thing can obtain. Now that they're integrated schools and the white teachers don't go for that, so, now, that's the basic thing. And I think all of the other problems stem from that. So—but, you see, we, being black, and having common roots—you might say common interests, common concerns—felt we had to be successful and to be successful you had to cope with the problems. Well, the white teachers don't feel that way. Well, from my understanding—well, my experience was that you could hardly get black teachers to come to—black parents to come to PTA. So I hear they don't go to PTA now. We could hardly get them to come to parent/teacher conferences. And I understand you can hardly get them to go to them now. So I think I have a sufficient basis on which to say that the parents have abdicated their responsibility, but they want to put the fault somewhere else, but it lies right at their door.

FB: Okay, thank you, Mr. Allen.

RA: You're very welcome. I'm glad you all finally ca—

end of interview